

# CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

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VOL. I.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you—JOHN xiii. 34.

## ON THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION. CHAPTER III.

Continued from page 182.

THE facts which are asserted by the original preachers of christianity were miraculous, and in the main, the same which are believed by modern Christians: and for the purpose of establishing them, those preachers underwent labours, dangers, and sufferings.

That the story attested by the first missionaries of christianity was miraculous, is, independent of specific proof, in the highest degree probable, from two considerations: 1st. It could have nothing else by which it could be supported. A young man, merely by calling himself the Son of God, and delivering lectures on morality, could not have excited among the Jews, who were witnesses of his life of suffering and his ignominious death, so much as a doubt whether he were the object of their ancient prophecies, upon which they had formed such magnificent expectations. And, turning from the Jews to the rest of the world, let us consider for a moment, what would have been the effect of a few Jews asserting among the heathen nations, that one of their countrymen, who had been put to death by the Roman governor, was a messenger from heaven? We may be certain, that unless they had insisted upon some supernatural attestations of his mission, they would have been considered and treated as madmen. 2d. We may infer, that the original story was miraculous, from the miraculous power laid claim to by the Christians of successive ages. If the accounts of these miracles be true, it was the continuation of the same powers; if they were false, it was an *imitation* of them: for it would be absurd to suppose that miracles should be pretended to by the followers of the apostles, if none were pretended to in their own persons, or in that of their master, by the apostles themselves.

In advancing to the more direct proofs, that the original story of Christianity was miraculous, we may observe, that no other story has been brought forward, and that the Jewish\* and Pagan writers who have alluded to it, tend to confirm our supposition that it was so. The miracles of Christ are recognised in the Talmudical† writings of the Jews; and Celsus, who opposed Christianity about a century after its promulgation, when the original story must have been well known, mentions some of them;‡ and our gospels are appealed to, as containing the original story of Christianity, by him, and his successors in infidelity, Porphyry§ and Julian. But, after all, where can we learn the original facts asserted by the apostles more unsuspiciously than from the incidental notices of their own LETTERS, letters which were written without the remotest design of transmitting the history of Christ or of Christianity to future ages, or even of making it known to their contemporaries. No fact that ever happened is more certain, than that these writings whether genuine¶ or not, were the productions of the first race of Christians, and that they were publicly known among them as works of instruction. This we can prove, by a regular and

\* If the celebrated passage in Josephus, (lib. xviii. c. 3.) be determined to be spurious, his silence on the subject of Christianity is still admirably made use of by Dr. Paley, Ev. Vol. I. page 121.

† Grotius de Verit. not. I. Clerisi, lib. ii. c. 5. and Hartly on the truth of the Christian Religion, p. 31.

‡ Origen contra Celsum, lib. ii.

§ "The testimony of Porphyry is still more important than that of Celsus. He lived indeed an hundred years later than the last mentioned evidence, but, this deficiency in point of time is abundantly supplied by his profound learning, and severely critical examination of the sacred writings." Marsh's Michaelis, c. ii. § 8.

¶ The epistles, from the nature of epistolary writings, and moreover from several of them being written not to particular persons, but to churches, carry in them evidences of their being genuine, beyond what can be in a mere historical narrative left to the world at large."—Butler's Analogy, part ii. 1.

unbroken chain of quotation and testimony, from the acknowledged period when the religion was in the act of being first promulgated to the world, to the present times.

I will briefly state the early testimony on which they rest: and for the sake of keeping the argument as distinct as possible, I will only insist upon those which are actually quoted or referred to in the few remaining works of the apostolic fathers,—and from them to our times by a regular succession of writers.

The early attestation afforded to the Epistles of St. Paul, shall be first mentioned: at the head of which must be placed the important evidence given to them in the second Epistle of St. Peter,\* which unequivocally ranks them among the Sacred Scriptures. Clement, of Rome, the companion of St. Paul, quotes passages from the Epistle to the Romans, from the first Epistle to the Corinthians, and from the Epistle to the Hebrews,—mentioning in the second case St. Paul as the author; in the others, citing the passages without the name of the writer, according to the method of quoting Scripture among the early Christians. Ignatius quotes the Epistle to the Ephesians,—Polycarp cites the same epistle, and also that to the Philippians, and refers incidentally to fourteen or fifteen books of the New Testament, among which are ten of St. Paul's Epistles, calling them, in general terms, Holy Scriptures and Oracles of the Lord. With respect to the remaining Epistles, there are references, in the brief writings of Clement of Rome, and of Hermas; to that of James, to the First and Second of St. Peter, and to the First of St. John. Polycarp also refers to the Second and Fourth of these.†

\* 2 Peter, chap. iii. verse 15, 16.

† The testimonies here referred to, may be seen in the laborious collection of Dr. Lardner; a very judicious and sufficient selection of all those of the greatest importance will also be found in Dr. Less's work on the authenticity, credibility, and uncorrupted preservation of the New Testament, which has been lately translated.



In short, out of our twenty-one received epistles, there are but four which are not quoted or referred to in the scanty works of the apostolical fathers,—and these four are sufficiently established in the writings of the next period.

We will now return to our argument.—The epistles which are thus early and confidently established, disclose to us, incidentally, the miracles and resurrection of Christ; the power of working miracles by the first preachers of the gospel; the miraculous conversion of St. Paul: and, what is more, it is unequivocally asserted in the age of the apostles, and in letters to persons among whom they were wrought, that miracles are the sign of an apostle.\*

*To be continued.*

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*Dialogue between a Universalist and a Limitarian.*

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 182.

*Uni.* On account of the established tradition of the church, which grew out of the superstitions of the Gentiles, the main doctrines of christianity became totally obscured, and though the name of Christianity was espoused, being set up by the Roman authority, the doctrines of gentilism became the creed of the church. This done, there was but a little difficulty in accommodating the many passages of Scripture, which speak of the judgments of God on nations and individuals for their wickedness, to the notions of ancient superstition; for the worldly wisdom which was employed in bringing over the Gentiles to the profession of Christianity found it to be more easy to accommodate the Scriptures to the superstitions of the Gentiles, than to effect any change in their sentiments. This accounts for all the erroneous applications of Scripture to a future judgment in another state of existence. Even the particular judgments, which were evidently restricted to particular nations, and to certain periods of time, have been transferred to a future state, and used to set up and maintain the opinion that in another world all men will be judged and rewarded according to their works in this. The doctrine of eternal punishment, the doctrine of an eternal hell, the doctrine of a real being, who is call-

ed the devil, who is the king and ruler of hell, though they all belong to christianity according to established tradition, are all the old superstitions of the heathen, and are found in their mythology.—This being the situation of the church, it is natural to suppose, that these superstitions, if ever overcome, would be done away by degrees. The light of natural reason combining with many clear passages of Scripture, which speak of the universal goodness of God, and of his impartiality in the distribution of his grace, was able to make an attack on the doctrine of endless punishment, at a period when great darkness reigned, and when even those who were enabled to see a ray of celestial light which indicated the final salvation of all mankind, were still involved in the traditions of the church, which had established the application of many passages of Scripture to a future judgment and to a state of punishment in another world. Therefore, those who first espoused the doctrine of universal salvation, after the apostacy, were able to contemplate it only as it could be rendered consistent with all the other superstitions of the church, which they were not yet able to call in question. Having been educated in the traditional notion that the wicked would be punished in a future state, they were only able to see the possibility of a deliverance from hell in some far distant age of eternity; and it is highly probable that the papal doctrine of a purgatory contributed to the establishment of certain minds in this opinion. More recently the doctrine of rewarding men for their good conduct in this life, in a future state, and of punishing men for their bad conduct in this mortal body, in another world and in a different constitution, has been, by many Universalists called in question and disbelieved, while those passages of Scripture, which were generally understood as pointing to this common sentiment about rewards and punishments in a future world, have been understood to have their most natural application to rewards and punishments exercised by the divine economy in the present state of existence. At this time there are those who profess to be Universalists, who believe in a state of punishment in the future world, in which the wicked will be tormented in literal fire and brim-

stone for ages and ages, after which, being by such dreadful tortures, humbled to repentance, they will be received to everlasting rest. There are others, who believe that those who leave this world in a state of unbelief, and of a sinful character, will wander in such darkness of mind as they were in while living, and experience the corodings of conscience until they are enlightened and recieve a manifestation of divine grace, by which they will be brought out of darkness into light, love and peace. Others are unable to learn from the Scriptures, that our future existence, concerning which, all we know is manifested by the resurrection of Jesus, who has become the first fruits of them that slept, will in any case be dependent on the degrees of moral light obtained while on earth, or the obedience or disobedience to moral precepts here in a mortal state. They are unable to learn from the sacred oracles, that God has revealed any other state of human existence, than the mortal or immortal, the earthly and the heavenly. Nor can they learn that the mortal, the earthly, the sinful, the mutable state extends beyond this natural life. They believe that our heavenly Father has manifested no other future existence than what he has brought to light by the resurrection of his holy child Jesus, who in his resurrection is the first fruits of them that slept, the first born of every creature.

As the resurrection state of Jesus is every where represented as glorious, and beyond the reach of any possible evil, so it seems that if all who die in Adam are made alive in Christ, they will be partakers of the same glory, and as entirely beyond the influence of evil. These thoughts seem to be set forth not only in the words of the apostle which we have already quoted from 1 Cor. 15, but if possible more fully, by the following from the same chapter: "So also is the resurrection of the dead; it is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, that the first man Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a quickening spirit, and as

\* 2 Cor. xli. 12.



we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. For this corruption must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." Now, my dear Sir, I will thank you to take this subject into careful consideration, and if you can find that our heavenly Father has revealed any other state of existence for mankind, than the two states, of which the apostle speaks in the above passages, be so kind as to inform me that I may be able to advance in the knowledge of this subject, concerning which I have spent much anxious study and careful investigation.

*To be continued.*

## Christian Messenger.

Philadelphia, Monday, June 26th, 1820.

FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

To "A friend to Truth and Consistency."

SIR,

I have attentively perused your observations addressed to me, contained in the forty-fourth Number of the Messenger, page 174, but discover nothing in them which should induce me to alter the opinions I have advanced in the article to which you write in answer. You will recollect it was there my design to establish the following proposition, viz. that "the mysteriousness of a doctrine was no proof of its falsity," and, I find no argument adduced by you tending to disprove it: and, Sir, I still believe that there are mysteries connected with religion, totally above our comprehension; \* indeed, it is reasonable to suppose that "The religion

\* I would not be understood to make use of the word mystery to express something which it is utterly impossible to understand or comprehend, but only something that is unknown or incomprehensible to us, until it shall be revealed or explained. See "Priestly's letters to a philosophical unbeliever." Letter V. "Campbell on the Gospel's preliminary dissertations."

"There is" also "a great difference between a mystery, and a direct absurdity and contradiction, such as *transubstantiation*, and other similar doctrines, which have been screened under that more venerable name, for mysteries are only that we certainly know nothing at all of, the other things that we certainly know to be false—the former we only do not understand, the latter we see cannot be understood," Foster's Sermons—Sermon 7.

that has any connexion with an INFINITE and INCOMPREHENSIBLE God and a boundless eternity, must be in many respects mysterious; unless a *finite* mind can fully understand *infinity*."\*

With respect to the contradiction you imagine you have discovered in my piece addressed to you, this arose entirely from your misunderstanding my meaning.—To explain myself, let us suppose words like the following to have occurred in Scripture.—"There are three persons in the Godhead, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, and these three are one."—in this case we would undoubtedly have "perfectly understood" the doctrine of the Trinity "as simply stated to be such," but still its mysteriousness would have remained as dark and incomprehensible as ever.

If I understand you correctly, you would wish to establish the following as an axiom, viz. "that miracles are not contrary to the laws of nature, but only appear to be so, because we are not acquainted with all those laws."—This at first sight, appears to be very plausible, but we must recollect, that if any thing is now proved *positively* and invariably to be a law of nature, nothing can be discovered hereafter that will prove the reverse of this law to be true. Thus, as it has been invariably, proved by experience, that substances specifically heavier than any given fluid will sink in it; however more intimately we may become acquainted with nature we will never find it to be one of its laws, that substances swim in fluids of less specific gravity than themselves, and the same will hold good with respect to every one of the laws of nature which have been experimentally established—until, indeed, those laws become changed.

I admit that it is in the power of God to suspend or counteract any of the established laws of nature, for any special purpose, and this, I believe takes place whenever a miracle is performed, all I contend for, is, that the *quo modo* remains a mystery to our finite understandings.

Admit, however, that circumstances which now appear to contradict our reason, may still be accordant to "some unknown law of nature," and on this

principle you at once do away all the objections to the doctrine of the Trinity and of the hypostatic union as well as to every other doctrine on the plea of their incomprehensibility; indeed, this very mode of reasoning has been adopted by Trinitarians in support of their theories.—"That three beings should be one being, is a proposition which certainly contradicts reason, that is, our reason,—but, it does not from thence follow, that it cannot be true,—for there are many propositions which contradict our reason, and yet, are demonstrably true: one, is the very first principle of all religion, the being of a God, for that any being should exist without a cause, or that any thing should be the cause of its own existence, are propositions equally contradictory to our reason,—yet, one of them must be true, or nothing could ever have existed."—"We know that no two beings with whose mode of existence we are acquainted, can exist in the same point of time, in the same point of space, and that therefore they cannot be one,—but how far beings, whose mode of existence bears no relation to time or space, may be united, we cannot comprehend,—and therefore, the possibility of such a union we cannot positively deny." So reasons Soame Jenyns,\* and on your principles his reasoning is correct. But, after all the question is not actually whether the miracles I have noticed in my former observations, are contrary to the laws of nature or not, but only whether they are comprehensible by us any further than that they actually took place,—and, my dear Sir, permit me to say that on your own mode of explaining the reasonableness of our belief in what I call mysteries, and what you have admitted to be contrary to the common or known laws of nature, our belief in the doctrine of the Trinity and of Christ's divinity, can also be supported—all you say, that we are bound to believe with respect to the resurrection, is, that the bodies which die, shall be restored to life, and undergo a change fitting them for another state of existence, with respect to any thing else on this point, we have nothing to do,—so say the advocates of the Trinity—Christ we are taught by the Scriptures to be a divine

\* Scott's sermons, vol. iii. page 454.

\* View of the internal evidences of the Christian religion, 4th edition, p. 160-162.



person in a human form, and one of the persons constituting the Godhead—this is all we are called upon to believe, but with regard to the mysteries of his uniting in himself the divine and human natures, or of his union with the other persons of the Godhead, these have not been revealed to us, and of course we have no concern with them.

To conclude, I am perfectly of opinion with a celebrated writer,\* that no doctrine is to be rejected, however mysterious or repellent to human reason, provided it is clearly taught in Scripture, and we have incontestible proof of the authenticity of that Scripture.—I therefore reject the doctrine of the Trinity, not because I cannot comprehend it,—not because the possibility of it has never been demonstrated to me, but, because I have no warrant for my belief in it, from that record," which I firmly believe to be a true transcript of the Revelations which God has been pleased to make to his creatures of such parts of his nature and providence, as is necessary for them to be acquainted with, in their present state of existence. \* \* \*

FROM THE UNIVERSALIST MAGAZINE.

To the Editor,

SIR,—In reply to your questions under my communication in your last Magazine,† I beg leave to observe, that by divine vengeance, the anger of God, God's visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, and similar expressions in Scripture, I understand that order of Providence, that established course of nature, or whatever you please to call it, by which misery is as necessarily connected with sin, as any effect with its cause. This "enlargement by way of illustration," is deemed sufficient for the first and second questions.

As to the third question I would observe, that I believe that those who conform to the precepts and example of the Messiah, as far as human nature is capable of doing, will be as happy as human nature is capable of being; and in proportion as any come short of this, their happiness is forever diminished, that is, less perfect than it would have been, had they been more virtuous and pious.

\* Dean of St. Patrick's. See also, Kelbrow on the divinity of Christ, page 88.

† See Christian Messenger, page 180.

The fourth question leads chiefly to a verbal criticism. Upon this I shall refer you to John viii. 56; "Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad." I understand this text to mean, that, by the eye of faith, Abraham foresaw the day of Christ's residence on earth, and if so, why not his character? And if he perceived before hand what the character of the Saviour would be, I see not why he may not be said to have imitated it, with as much propriety as those are said to do so, who are now living, centuries after his ascension, and are acquainted with his character only through the medium of history.

PRIESTLY.

### INQUIRY.

After thanking our correspondent "PRIESTLY," for some explanations which appeared in our last,\* we must still beg his indulgence while we request him to be more explicit on one particular. If we rightly understand him when he says; "I believe that those who conform to the precepts and example of the Messiah, as far as human nature is capable of doing, will be as happy as human nature is capable of being; and in proportion as any come short of this, their happiness is forever diminished, that is, less perfect than it would have been, had they been more virtuous and pious," his argument necessarily embraces the idea that all mankind, who have committed any sin in this world will be forever less happy therefor, and in proportion to the sins which they have committed. If this doctrine be acknowledged it appears to us to embrace the dreadful doctrine of the endless condemnation of all who have sinned and come short of the glory of God. How then is it true in any sense whatever, that where sin abounded grace did much more abound? Or how shall we understand the divine testimony by the prophet, who says; "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more?" We would thank our worthy friend "Priestly" to correct us, if we do not rightly understand him; but we feel a strong desire to do away the notion of an unforgiving spirit either in God or in ourselves.

St. Paul was a very great sinner, and

\* See above.

for some time as unconformed to the precepts and example of the Messiah as any man, who ever lived. Now we wish to know whether he will be *forever* as miserable as he was then sinful. But here is a difficulty; he was afterward as much conformed, perhaps, as any man who ever lived; will he *forever* enjoy a corresponding degree of felicity? How can he be *forever* as miserable as he was unconformed to the Messiah before his conversion, and *forever* as happy as he was conformed afterward?

How can this doctrine be reconciled with the enjoyments of our children? If they are disobedient for a time, is there no way whereby they may afterward become obedient, and as happy in the enjoyment of their parents as they would have been if they had never disobeyed? Was the reformed prodigal less happy than before he left his father's house?

### MARRIED,

By the Right Rev. Bishop White, HENRY J. WILLIAMS, Esq. to JULIA, daughter of the late Dr. Benjamin Rush.

By the Rev. Mr. Kneeland, Mr. AYMORE RANYER to Miss LOUISA LOYD.

### DIED,

On the 16th inst. suddenly, by a fall from a scaffold, while in the act of raising a ladder, Mr. JOSHUA TESTON, member of the first Universalist church in this city, aged 38. He has left a wife and six children to mourn his untimely end. "In the midst of life, we are in death."

On the 17th inst. RICHARD, the second son of Mr. Thomas Dallett, aged 9 years and 3 months.

## POETS' CORNER.

FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

### ACROSTIC.

Behold the calm decline of life,  
All free from bustle, noise and strife,  
Revered by old and young;  
Blest with the hope of future bliss,  
At God's high throne of happiness,  
Rejoicing souls among;—  
All from religion sprung.

And O the scene when virtue dies!  
New transports to the soul arise,  
Nor aught could keep it from the skies.

Kings, Princes, Nobles, all must fall;  
Each from his country God will call,  
Nor save him from the tomb:  
The Statesman, Hero, and the sage,  
Once met by dim declining age,  
Ne'er can escape their doom.

FREEMAN.